

Exploring Informational Text Structure

1. Is there a table of contents? How does it help you?
2. Is there a glossary? What information does it offer?
3. Is there an index? How does an index help you?
4. Are there headings? What do you learn from these?
5. Are there sidebars? Boxed photos and/or text?
Why do you think the author included these?
6. Does the size of print change? What can you learn from these changes?
7. Do chapters have titles? What do you learn from these?

Authors rarely use just one structure, throughout a text. A section or a paragraph might contain one structure, but an entire book will usually have several structures working together.

The Six Basic Structures of Informational Texts

Sequence or Chronological Order: Details support a main topic and are presented in a specific or time order.

Key words that signal sequencing: until, before, after, next, finally, now, first, last, then, on (date), at (time), first, second, etc.

Compare / Contrast: Presents and describes how two or more topics or ideas are similar or different.

Key words: on the other hand, and yet, similarly, while, less than, however, similar to, but, either...or, more than, other, like, nevertheless, neither, unlike, difference, same as, as opposed to, least, differently, likewise, most, etc.

Cause and Effect: Presents and describes events and actions and gives reasons and/or consequences for these.

Key words: since, so that, nevertheless, because, for this reason, if...then, therefore, consequently, then, this led to, as a result, so, due to, etc.

Problem and Solution: Describes a problem and its cause and offers one or more solutions.

Key words: one reason is, a solution, a problem, solved by, outcome, issues are, etc.

Question and Answer: Poses a question about a topic, event, concept, or an idea, presents causes of the problem and offers one or more solutions.

Key words: how, when, what, where, why, who, how many, it could be that, etc.

Description: Offers information about a topic, concept, event, person, idea, or object by describing attributes, features, facts, details, traits, and characteristics.

Key words: for example, such as, characteristics are, look at, like, as, by observing, etc.

*As you help students identify structure while reading,
you also support expository writing by providing students with models.*